Abdullah withdraws from Afghanistan runoff

BY DIANNA CAHN  
Stars and Stripes

KABUL — Abdullah Abdullah, the chief rival to Afghan President Hamid Karzai, said Sunday he was withdrawing from the presidential runoff scheduled for Saturday because he did not believe free and fair elections were possible.

Abdullah said the widespread fraud in the Aug. 20 presidential election had marred the process and he did not believe the situation had improved.

"The first election was full of fraud and the Electoral Complaint Commission just threw out a small amount of the fraudulent votes, not all of them," Abdullah said in Dari at a morning news conference. He was referring to the United Nations-backed commission that threw out close to a million Karzai votes as forgeries, reducing Karzai's showing to 48 percent versus Abdullah's 27 percent and forcing a runoff.

"I've always wanted a stable Afghanistan, a peaceful Afghanistan and also I wanted the election to be clean and clear," Abdullah said. "But it wasn't what I'd hoped. I don't think it is a good idea to participate in the election because it will be just like the previous one."

Abdullah's decision undermined hopes of western leaders that a runoff election could restore legitimacy to the Afghan presidency, which had been badly marred by the acknowledgement of ballot-stuffing and voter fraud in the Aug. 20 vote.

SEE RUNOFF ON PAGE 2

Pentagon tells KBR to cut workers in Iraq or face fines  
Page 3

Game 3 course reversed when replay gives A-Rod a homer  
Back page

Two reservists earn title of ‘Best Medics in the Army’  
Page 5
New warships meet Navy's need for speed

BY DAVID SHARP
The Associated Press

BATH, Maine — The Navy's need for speed is being answered by a pair of warships that have reached freeway speeds during testing at sea.

Independence, a 418-foot warship built in Alabama, boasts a top speed in excess of 45 knots, or about 52 mph, and sustained 44 knots for four hours during builder trials that wrapped up this month in the Gulf Coast. The 378-foot Freedom, a ship built in Wisconsin by a competing defense contractor, has put up a similarly strong showing.

Both versions of the Littoral Combat Ship use powerful diesel engines, as well as gas turbines for extra speed. They use steerable waterjets instead of propellers and rudders and have shallower drafts than conventional warships, letting them zoom close to shore.

The ships, better able to chase down pirates, have been fast-tracked because the Navy wants vessels that can operate in coastal, or littoral, waters. Freedom is due to be deployed next year, two years ahead of schedule.

Independence is an aluminum, tri-hulled warship built by Austal USA in Mobile, Ala. The lead contractor in Maine's Bath Iron Works, a subsidiary of General Dynamics.

Lockheed Martin Corp. is leading the team that built Freedom in Marinette, Wis. It looks more like a conventional warship, with a bulbous bow made of steel.

The stakes are high for both teams. The Navy plans to select Lockheed Martin over General Dynamics, but not both, as the builder. The Navy has ordered one more ship from each of the teams before it decides which is the final design. Eventually, the Navy wants to build up to 55 of them.

Speed has long been requisitioned by Navy skippers. Capt. John Fuel Jones, sometimes described as father of the U.S. Navy, summed it up this way in 1778: "I wish to have a ship that does not sail fast; for I intend to go in harm's way."

Eric Wertheim, author and editor of the U.S. Naval Institute's "Guide to Combat Fleets of the World," said speed is a good thing, but it comes at a cost.

"This is really something revolutionary," Wertheim said. "The question is how important and how expensive is this burst of speed?"

Early cost estimates for Littoral Combat Ships were about $220 million apiece, but costs spiraled because of the Navy's requirements and its desire to expedite construction. The cost of the ships is capped at $460 million apiece, starting in the new fiscal year.

Both ships are built to accommodate helicopters and mission "modules" for either anti-submarine missions, mine removal or traditional surface warfare. The modules are designed to be swapped out within 24 hours, allowing the ships to adapt quickly to new missions.

While they're fast, they aren't necessarily the fastest military ships afloat. The Navy used to have missile-equipped destroyers and the Marines' air-cushioned landing craft is capable of similar speeds, Wertheim said. And smaller ships are capable of higher speeds.

Nonetheless, the speed is impressive, especially considering that other large naval vessels have been cruising along at a relatively pokey 30 to 35 knots for decades.

Loren Thompson, a defense analyst at the Lexington Institute, noted that Independence sustained 44 knots despite a 30-knot headwind and 6- to 8-foot seas in Alabama's Mobile Bay. "For a ship of this size, it's simply unheard of to sustain that rate of speed for four hours," he said.

Identities: Some Social Security numbers still found online

IDENTITIES, FROM PAGE 1

"We're at the beginning stages of this," Jenkins said. "We're taking this very seriously and aggressively pursuing action." Military officials could not explain why it took nearly a year to address the complaint.

Malanoff, however, said he acted immediately when his group discovered the problem in 2005. He notified the Government Printing Office, which prints the Congressional Record and publishes the three major commercial databases that publish online versions of the federal publication: W.S. Hein, LexisNexis and Westlaw.

Malanoff has not conducted a follow-up audit.

When contacted by Stars and Stripes after the newspaper discovered official's Social Security numbers were still available on HeinOnline.org, W.S. Hein acknowledged that it had received the complaint from Malanoff but had yet to redact its catalog.

"We have tried some redacting software ... but it is not accurate and it requires a great deal of manual intervention," company President Kevin Marimon said in an e-mail Friiday to Stars and Stripes. The problem, he said, is that Hein's versions are scanned copies of the original documents and were not manually typed into the database like most other digitized editions.

"We are currently redacting Social Security numbers from another online project that has more recent Social Security numbers in it and the Congressional Record will follow," Marimon said.

LexisNexis spent seven months reducing the numbers from its online databases, completing the task in 2008, company spokesman Jorge Martinez wrote in an e-mail to Stars and Stripes.

Westlaw immediately took down its database last October following Malanoff's complaint, according to its parent company, Thomson Reuters.

After manually redacting the information it was put back online within a day, and the company now scans all Congressional Record content for Social Security numbers and other sensitive information before posting it in its database, company spokesman John Shaughnessy wrote in an e-mail to Stars and Stripes.

But even after a database is scrubbed there is the potential to miss information, Malanoff said.

An oversight was responsible for the 2,700 Social Security numbers he found in 2005 in the GPO's online archive of the Congressional Record from the mid-1990s. The agency, which has since removed them, had redacted most of the Social Security numbers in the late 1990s under the direction of the Senate, GPO spokesman Gary Sonserret said in an e-mail to Stars and Stripes.

Malanoff said there needs to be a process to ensure the material has been removed from the public files. He has urged the military to inform the affected officers.

Jenkins, with the Defense Privacy Office, said it would be too difficult to contact individuals and that his office is instead considering posting a notice on its Web site directing them to closely monitor their credit.

Credit monitoring is provided by the Dodd only to those who can prove their credit already has been hurt by documents the military published, Jenkins said.

And questions still linger about how to remove the Social Security numbers in print editions of the Congressional Record held by the millions of local libraries around the country that participate in the Federal Depository Library Program.

Jenkins said his office is committed to redacting the records but has yet to develop a plan for the massive undertaking.

"This is an ongoing process," he said.

The information became part of the Congressional Record because the military needs Senate approval to officially promote officers. Generals and admirals typically appear before the Senate before they rise in rank, though most promotions are approved on masse through a list provided by the military.

Before 1997, the list included officers' names, ranks and full Social Security numbers. From then until last year, it included only the last four digits of the Social Security numbers along with the corresponding names and ranks and is still available through the GPO's Web site. This year, the numbers were completely removed from the process, according to the GPO.

Said Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Lee Maloney: "It was appropriate to provide the full Social Security numbers when they were provided. We're now taking steps to alleviate the possibility that [ID theft] could happen."

Jenkins said the military had not received any reports of fraud as a result of the Congressional Record, but media reports from 1999 indicate that identity thieves successfully obtained credit cards for scores of high-level military officers using Social Security numbers culled from the Congressional Record.

Social Security number use

In the Congressional Record:

Before 1997: Officers' names, ranks and full Social Security numbers.

1997-2005: None, rank and the last four digits of a Social Security number.

After 2005: Officers' Social Security numbers completely struck from use.

— Government Printing Office

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